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**Out of Many: Religious Pluralism in America
A Bridging Cultures at Community Colleges Program**

**White Paper
Cooperative Agreement ME-50001-12**

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Summary

The Newberry Library's Dr. William M. Scholl Center for American History and Culture, working through a cooperative agreement with the NEH under its Bridging Cultures at Community Colleges Program, developed and implemented "Out of Many: Religious Pluralism in America," a multiyear professional development project for faculty members from community colleges across the United States. The project helped community college faculty and administrators strengthen instruction on religious pluralism in the United States through directed study, intensive seminars with scholars in the field, and collaborative research focused on curriculum development using primary source materials. "Out of Many" brought together teams of faculty from six campuses (a total of twenty faculty members and six administrators) over the course of two consecutive summers. Participants in the program teach at El Paso Community College, McHenry County Community College, College of Du Page, Ivy Tech Community College, Wilbur Wright Community College, and Georgia Perimeter Community College. Through their participation in "Out of Many," participants conducted new and original research that informed their scholarship and their teaching in the humanities. Many revised existing courses in the humanities and some designed new course sequences for their students. The program also reached a general audience through public lectures by Martin Marty and Diana Eck, two of the most distinguished scholars of American religion working today. One enduring resource of the project is the website [Out of Many: Religious Pluralism in America](http://publications.newberry.org/outofmany/) [http://publications.newberry.org/outofmany/], which draws on as well as expands upon research conducted by the community college faculty members. The website includes collections of primary sources in American religious history that have been curated and annotated by the project's participants. With discussion questions and suggestions on additional reading, this website is designed to help integrate the study of America's religious diversity into classroom teaching across the humanities. Some of the resources from the *Out of Many* website have also been collected into the "Out of Many" project's final product, *Faith in the City: Chicago's Religious Diversity in the Era of the World's Fair*. A map-based exploration of Chicago's religious communities at the turn of the twentieth century designed for classroom use, *Faith in the City* integrates the study of Chicago's religious diversity into the city's history by combining the sources digitized by the "Out of Many" project with commissioned essays by scholars in the field. This final project will be launched in the winter of 2014 and will be available at <http://publications.newberry.org/faith>.

Overview of the Program

Upon receiving final documentation of the cooperative agreement from the NEH, Newberry staff prepared publicity and application materials for the program. These included a project website (no longer live at the time of this report). All publicity material was either written in consultation with or reviewed by the Newberry's NEH program officer. Publicity efforts included: an NEH-produced flyer, a posting on the American Academy of Religion (AAR) homepage, announcements by regional branches of the AAR, an announcement to the Community College Historians Yahoo! Group, postings to multiple religious studies listservs and blogs, and emails to every humanities department within the City Colleges of Chicago system. In addition to these efforts, Scholl Center staff also generated a great deal of word-of-mouth publicity. The AAR introduced the Scholl Center staff to several community college faculty who had worked with the AAR previously. Based on the applications received, the project directors

found that personal networks of these individuals and organizations were the best means to reach interested faculty.

Interested community college faculty were instructed to apply in teams of two to four with a sponsoring administrator. The Newberry received ten completed applications that included forty-two faculty and administrators from nine community college systems: Georgia Perimeter College (Atlanta, Georgia); Butler Community College (El Dorado, Kansas); Wilbur Wright Community College (Chicago, Illinois); Ivy Tech Community College (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana); College of Du Page (Glen Ellyn, Illinois); McHenry County Community College (Crystal Lake, Illinois); Northeast Iowa Community College (Calmar, Iowa); Harry S. Truman Community College (Chicago, Illinois); and El Paso Community College (El Paso, Texas). The project directors selected participants in consultation with Dr. Boggs, as required by the Cooperative Agreement. Project directors ultimately selected six teams (twenty faculty members total) from El Paso Community College, McHenry County Community College, College of Du Page, Ivy Tech Community College, Wilbur Wright Community College, and Georgia Perimeter Community College. All of our initial invitations were accepted, so we did not have to move to a waiting list.

The program's first meeting, a weeklong workshop at the Newberry, was held from June 25–29, 2012. Dr. Boggs attended part of the workshop, welcomed participants, and spoke about the goals of the NEH's Bridging Cultures initiative. The workshop's daily schedule consisted of morning seminars with visiting faculty. Drs. Greene and Cantwell led the workshop's first morning seminar. The other seminars were led by Tisa Wenger, Assistant Professor of Religious History at Yale Divinity School; Martin Marty, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School; Kevin Schultz, Associate Professor of History and Catholic Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Aziz Huq, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Chicago Law School. Participants devoted their afternoons to researching in the library's collection. One of the main goals of this workshop was for participants to conceive of and begin researching a digital collection for the classroom--a teaching resource that brings together a handful of primary source documents around a theme, supplemented by contextual information and questions written by the project participants. The summer 2012 meeting also included a public lecture by Martin Marty at the Newberry on a Tuesday evening. Approximately eighty people attended Dr. Marty's lecture, and the Newberry posted a recording of the program on its website. Participating faculty reported finding the summer workshop very rewarding in brief evaluations the Scholl Center designed and distributed on the workshop's final day. They unanimously praised the program's visiting scholars for their presentations and their collegiality, and they noted that the readings would enhance their classroom teaching.

After the conclusion of the program's summer 2012 meeting at the Newberry, project staff built and moderated a WordPress blog titled *Pluralities* to sustain the program's momentum throughout the academic year. Participating faculty received access to the blog, and the project directors periodically encouraged them to share their ongoing efforts to integrate the study of America's religious diversity into their classrooms. The project directors authored and moderated the majority of the blog posts, and project participants regularly commented on them, engaging each other in dialogue. Some of the project's visiting scholars also participated in these online discussions. Posts by faculty included discussions of current events, as well as reviews of new teaching resources. Project Directors made the blog private and accessible only to program participants in order to create a safe place for dialogue about religious pluralism. The *Pluralities* blog also proved quite useful in circulating the participant's digital research

projects and in preparing for the program's summer 2013 meeting at the Newberry. Throughout the spring, Scholl Center staff relied exclusively on the blog to distribute the primary sources from the Newberry's collection that participating faculty chose to digitize. The blog also became a platform for participating faculty to submit drafts of their digital collection text for collaborative peer review. Faculty posted their works in progress on the blog, and the project directors, other program participants, and even the program's visiting scholars offered feedback on the faculty's work.

The second summer workshop was held at the Newberry from June 26-28, 2013. The workshop began with a walking tour of nearby religious sites, including Fourth Presbyterian Church, Holy Name Cathedral, and the Moody Bible Institute. Professor Diana L. Eck, Director of the Pluralism Project and Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies and Frederic Wertham Professor of Law and Psychiatry in Society at Harvard University, led the Thursday morning seminar, while Project Directors Greene and Cantwell led the Friday morning seminar. Participating faculty devoted their afternoons to research in the Newberry's collection, except on Friday when faculty presented their digital collection projects to their fellow participants; sponsoring administrators; and Barbara Ashbrook, Assistant Director of the NEH's Division of Education Programs. The summer 2013 meeting also included a public lecture by Professor Eck at the Newberry on Wednesday evening. Approximately 120 people attended Professor Eck's lecture. Newberry staff recorded the event and posted it as a podcast. Participating faculty unanimously praised the June meeting, as well as the program as a whole, in brief evaluations distributed by Newberry staff on the workshop's final day. Many remarked the program would significantly enhance their classroom teaching and campus programming.

At the conclusion of the second summer workshop, the project's focus turned toward building and launching its digital components. The project directors closed the *Pluralities* blog, but saved its content for the benefit of future projects. From there, Newberry staff took the digital collections and items from the blog to build a permanent, public website to host them. Working with staff in the Newberry's department of Digital Initiatives and Services, the project directors designed a site that houses the participating faculty's digital collections. The website was built using [Omeka](http://omeka.org/) [http://omeka.org/], an open-source content management system and web development software that allows for the creation of digital exhibits. The site, titled [Out of Many: Religious Pluralism in America](http://publications.newberry.org/outofmany/), is now live. It includes eight collaboratively-authored collections that make use of nearly eighty digitized sources from the Newberry's collection. The site, which will live on the Newberry's servers, can be visited here: <http://publications.newberry.org/outofmany/>.

In addition to publishing the participating faculty's digital collections online, the project directors also expanded upon the project's insights and resources by creating a digital exhibit on Chicago's religious diversity. Drawing upon and supplementing many of the sources digitized by participating faculty, the exhibit, titled *Faith in the City: Chicago's Religious Diversity in the Era of the World's Fair*, will similarly serve as an enduring resource when it is finished. With over 300 digitized sources from repositories throughout the Chicago region and nearly two dozen new essays by scholars in the field, *Faith in the City* will introduce scholars, students, and the general public to Chicago's--indeed, America's--remarkable religious diversity. The project's map-based, mobile friendly design also allows Chicago's residents and visitors to see the impact religion has had upon their neighborhoods and community. This digital project is currently in beta testing with an estimated launch at the end of this calendar year. The project directors contracted with a web development firm to build the project in [Drupal](https://www.drupal.org/) [https://www.drupal.org/], an open-source web development software that the Newberry can support and maintain. When launched, the site will be located at <http://publications.newberry.org/faith>.

Project Accomplishments and Successes

“Out of Many” was able to accomplish all of the goals laid out in its cooperative agreement with the NEH. The participating faculty all rated their experience highly and reported that their participation in the program would enhance their teaching. “Out of Many’s” digital projects will stand as enduring resources for students and educators everywhere. In addition to its planned activities, the project also generated a number of additional achievements that enhanced project’s impact and reach. The NEH, for example, ran a feature story of Professor Martin Marty’s public lecture at the Newberry and included the audio of his talk with the story [<http://www.neh.gov/news/out-many>]. The AAR also partnered with the project, providing opportunities at its 2012 and 2013 annual meetings for participating faculty to present on their work. At the 2012 annual meeting in Chicago, five participating faculty from different humanities disciplines presented to approximately thirty people on how they integrate the study of religion into their classrooms. At the 2013 meeting in Baltimore, two participating faculty presented their digital collections to about thirty people. In Baltimore, the project directors also officially launched the *Out of Many* Omeka website and were joined by the Newberry’s Program Officer who spoke about the goals of the NEH’s “Bridging Cultures” initiative.

The project’s greatest accomplishments came from the initiative of the participating faculty. Their energy and commitment to the project not only underscores the importance of selecting a strong cohort, but the benefits of building a cohort out of faculty teams drawn from a particular campus or system. The faculty from Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis, for example, used their participation in the program to organize several campus-wide forums on their community’s religious diversity. This forum then became the grounds from which Ivy Tech applied for, and was awarded, the NEH’s *Muslim Journeys* bookshelf. This is just one example of the multiplier effect this project had for participating faculty and their communities.

The project also drew considerable strength by making research time a part of our summer meetings. Burdened with heavy teaching loads, participants universally praised the time given to research in the library’s collection. And it was from this faculty research that many of the project’s unplanned accomplishments emerged. These include:

- A panel presentation at the Community College Humanities Association’s 2013 Annual Meeting in Louisville.
- New courses on American or local Religious History at three campuses.
- A new digital project on Atlanta’s religious diversity by the Georgia Perimeter College team.
- A commissioned roundtable by the AAR on teaching religion at community colleges that featured faculty from two campus teams.

Project Challenges

By far the most significant challenge in running this Bridging Cultures project was time. While participating faculty went above and beyond in their commitment to the project, the heavy teaching loads and service responsibilities of community college faculty made some aspects of the program less successful than others. In particular, participating faculty did not participate in the group blog to the degree we would have liked. The majority of the posts came for the project directors who had to regularly encourage discussion. Faculty reported simply not having the time to take on the added burden of a digital communication during the academic

year. If the project directors were to run this project again, we would likely replace the ongoing digital discussion with some kind of one-time event between the project's summer workshops. This could be an additional onsite meeting or an extended virtual meeting.

This problem of time also informed the challenge of posting the project's digital resources on schedule. Several faculty were late or delayed in delivering their materials during the academic year. Future programs that work with community college faculty would do well to give faculty ample time during on-site meetings to write any products a project is hoping to publish.

A final challenge we encountered stemmed from administrator buy in. If a multiyear project is a major commitment for individual faculty members, it can be an even bigger one for administrators. One group of faculty who did not apply to the program reported to us that they were unable to because no administrator could make the commitment to attend a summer workshop a year in advance. Other teams found that the administrators who initially sponsored their application were either unable or unwilling to attend the second summer workshop. Scheduling conflicts and campus turnover were the major reasons. Several teams had to scramble to find new administrators to attend the second summer workshop. Going forward, a better structure may be to have the teams choose partnering administrators in the midst of the program around a specific project to ensure that the administrator's role is clearly defined.

Conclusion

We found the "Out of Many" program to be both rewarding and successful. Faculty reported that the subject of religious diversity spoke not only to their intellectual interests, but also to the issues they face as educators of religiously diverse student bodies. Similarly, the project's inclusion of new digital publications not only afforded participating faculty with much appreciated research time, but also produced enduring resources that educators beyond the program's cohort may utilize. These two features, along with committed participating faculty and engaged visiting scholars, would enhance any Bridging Cultures at Community Colleges program.